

# WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

## MARCH 2, 2005

*Handout(s) distributed tonight are Subcommittee Reports for:*

1. *Public Works*
2. *Council on Aging*
3. *Health/Youth/Veterans*
4. *Police*

Member(s) absent: Hofmann, Stratford

Also present: Acting Town Administrator Rebecca Vose, Selectman Angelo Firenze, Kathy Miller (in lieu Scott Stratford), Acting Treasurer Daniela Boccia, Police Chief Andy O'Malley, Sgt. Peter Hoerr, and Town Accountant Barbara Hagg

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:36 PM.

Chairman Widmer reminded the Committee of Saturday's meeting with the School Committee – 9 am at the CMS Community Room. Chairman Widmer encouraged all the Warrant Committee members to attend.

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Town's Financial Software will be the first item on the agenda. Please review the information in tonight's packet.

### ***Acceptance of Minutes***

The Committee discussed the minutes of the February 16, 2005 meeting.

- *Selectman Solomon made a motion, Vice Chair Jones seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes of the February 16, 2005 meeting.*

Special Town Meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 21 for the purpose of the Fire Station funding. Our Budget Night is scheduled for Tuesday, March 22, with a regular Warrant Committee meeting on Wednesday, March 23. Chairman Widmer and the Committee decided to combine the STM and Budget Night and have both on Monday, March 21.

### ***Fire Department Building Update (to be discussed fully with the Fire Station Building Committee on 3/9)***

Member Oates mentioned the new stations bids came back \$1.1 million over what they were projected. Also, the cleanup of the Trapelo Road site was more costly than anticipated – an additional \$400K. We have some contingency fees, but there would not be enough to furnish the buildings. The cost was reevaluated monthly last Fall by the architect. A redesigned was discussed with the FSBC. Bob McLaughlin, Chair of the FSBC, will be here to discuss this next week.

Member Brusch reviewed the Fire Station issue from the Capital Budget Committee perspective. A consultant has been suggested by the Permanent Building Committee. Richard Marks is looking at the plans to see if there is any cost savings, as well as looking into what the market is doing now. Member Brusch and others met with the DOR. It would cost the Town \$79K in the first year to bond the additional \$1.1 million over the next 20 years. Member Curtis added that the \$1.1 million could always be brought back to the voters at some point.

Vice Chair Jones said the only thing timely is the construction industry's index. DOR needs to review those indices and they will see how much those costs really are. Member Brusch mentioned that April 6 is the last day the contract can be signed.

### ***Role of the Warrant Committee***

Chairman Widmer reviewed the process of putting the budget together. The role of the Warrant Committee is the body that presents the budget to Town Meeting. We are the arm of Town Meeting, and they are the Legislative body to vote it. Recently here it has been important for the Town to have the strongest possible Warrant Committee. Given the enormity that is facing us, both the Board of Selectmen and Warrant Committee are needed at the table. Chairman Widmer underscored the fact that a succession of chairs have felt it is important for the Warrant Committee to have a stronger role, not around copier costs, but around policy issues and things that can have a difference in the long-term (such as health insurance).

Member Brusch said the budget that we bring to Town Meeting is our budget. We may have a split vote, but it is our budget that goes to Town Meeting. We are the Town's official watchdog, and it is our responsibility to report on financial matters. The Warrant Committee report should provide analysis and recommendations of each department. The Board of Selectmen looks to us to delve into the real issues with departments and department heads.

Selectman Solomon said this is just a local version that happens at the state and national level. The legislative branch makes the budget decisions at each level. He finds this process very helpful. There is always going to be the need for an objective view.

Member Curtis suggested that in the summer lull have a training program for the Warrant Committee members. Chairman Widmer thinks that is an excellent suggestion. Member Paolillo suggested we should meet with departments on a quarterly basis to understand the ebb and flow of where the department is with their budget. Looking at the departments and determining what is in place would help for us to be truly informed in what is going on at that level. Chairman Widmer further added that at least three separate meetings are necessary (possibly in September, January and April or so) to gain a better department understanding.

### ***FY06 Subcommittee Reports***

#### ***Public Works (Handout 1)***

DPW – The Subcommittee is recommending an additional cemetery worker due to the new cemetery expecting to open in FY06. Looking at staffing, there are no critical breaking points. Town Accountant Hagg and the Subcommittee support two additional positions if more money were available. This is not a reason to have an override in and of itself. Member Curtis reviewed the long-term policy concerns. He also spoke to the possible need for additional budget cuts and mentioned \$40K available from sidewalk maintenance. Should additional cuts be necessary, Director Castanino believes that the Town should think about eliminating services – such as trash pickup – rather than imposing across-the-board cuts in personnel. Vice Chair Jones added it is an exceptional amount of service that is provided by the DPW.

### ***Council on Aging (Handout 2)***

Member Doblin mentioned the Subcommittee feels there should be a dedicated custodian for the COA, but it could be in Kevin Looney's reporting structure and budget. COA would like to increase the Program Coordinator from 25 to 30 hours, but the Subcommittee is not recommending this due to budget constraints.

Member Doblin said we need to look at an increase in activity fees with an increase in programming when a new Senior Center is available. The transportation for seniors is especially important to the COA Director because she feels it is a direct link for seniors to be getting to their medical appointments in a low cost manner.

Member Callanan added that this is a good time to look at regionalization of senior center services.

### ***Health/Youth/Veterans (Handout 3)***

Member Hobbs reviewed the FY06 needs and long-term needs with the Committee. She mentioned regionalization or sharing opportunities with surrounding towns.

Vice Chair Jones mentioned it might be helpful to get Fire and Health together on regionalization and response needs.

Member Hobbs is concerned the materials budget is down even though we are satisfying the State requirement.

### ***Police (Handout 4)***

Member Paolillo reviewed the staffing model and the associated issues with minimal staffing levels. Selectman Firenze asked the target level for overtime. Member Paolillo said it varies week to week.

One of the traffic officers has been assigned to the patrol bureau to cover a shortage in patrol officers. Selectman Firenze asked if it would be cost effective for us to add a police officer if it could bring in more revenues. Town Accountant Hagg will look into the amount or percentage returned from the State to Belmont from tickets or traffic violations.

The Subcommittee supports the filling of two patrol officers that are part of the FY06 Budget recommendations. Forty-seven FTE's is the level service amount from FY05.

Selectman Firenze said it is likely there will be another 2-3 officers leaving in the next year, so we will never reach the level service of 47 at a rate of 41 weeks to get an officer in the field. Chief O'Malley concurred that he is expecting 2-3 officers leaving in the next fiscal year as well as four others who have informed him that they are on other town's lists.

***Other***

Vice Chair Jones said there are six candidates for Town Administrator who will be interviewed on Sunday. The Search Committee will be bringing the candidates to the Board of Selectmen meeting on Monday.

Selectman Solomon mentioned the Selectmen approved a Health Care Insurance Working Group at their last meeting. Member Curtis has been volunteered as the Warrant Committee representative.

Member Heigham made a motion and it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina Frizzell, Recording Clerk